

Selinger banking on daycare spaces in bid for re-election ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Premier Greg Selinger's line in the re-election sand is more daycares in more schools.

Less than a year from the provincial election the premier has become the point person for the governing NDP's plan to add more licensed daycare spaces.

Last week Selinger announced at Little Saints Learning Centre in St. Vital another 900 new daycare spaces will be funded this year, and a pay raise for early-childhood educators, under the government's five-year plan to add 5,000 newly funded licensed spaces.

On Thursday he was at Donwood Elementary School in northeast Winnipeg to open the new Laugh 'N' Learn School Age Centre Inc. which will accommodate 20 infant and 54 pre-school spaces.

"What it's all about is making sure families have the tools and supports they need to have success in our communities," the premier said.

The NDP's day care plan will be bolstered in the fall when a provincial commission tables its report on how the province can move towards implementing a universally accessible day-care system.

The report will also examine how the current community-based non-profit model can be supported or improved, and whether Manitoba can better integrate school and child care systems, such as adding even more day care centres to existing schools. About one half of the daycares being built now with provincial funding are attached to schools.

The report will also give the wounded NDP ammunition it needs as it heads to the polls next April and tries to win a fifth term in power, and provide Selinger and his MLAs with more to attack the Opposition Progressive Conservatives and their plan to open the province up to more private, for-profit daycare.

The governing New Democrats have been down in public opinion polls as of late, stung by its increase to the retail sales tax in 2013 and more recently political infighting that saw Selinger challenged for leadership of the party.

Tory MLA and family services critic Ian Wishart has said by allowing more private, for-profit centres to operate, it would help ease up on wait times for day care services. Manitoba has about 35 private, for-profit centres, number that's been the same since 2000.

"We do know that there are some people who are willing to pay a little more for child care," he said. "Why not create a competitive, private system that's inspected and is up to the same standards?"

Selinger also said the Tory plan would turn back the clock.

"The research shows that private day care means less accessibility, lower wages and lower quality," he said. "And the benefits don't stay in the community, they leak out of the community.

"The non-profit system that we have in Manitoba—parent governance, so they have a say in the running of the daycare—means better wages, better pension plan, better accessibility and improved quality."

Selinger has said when the Tories were in government during the 1990s they capped the number of day care spaces and cut \$8 million out of the public system.

"We have second-lowest (daycare) rates in the country. We regulate them," he said. "The pressures would be enormous, constantly, from private owners to lift the cost of the day care."

Selinger said that since the NDP came to power 15 years ago, the government has created more than 14,000 new spaces, bringing the total number of spaces to almost 30,000.

However, at the same time wait lists for daycare has skyrocketed. About 12,000 children are listed on the province's central registry, several hundred more than two years ago, and daycares all over Winnipeg say they have hundreds of children on their internal lists.

Region: Manitoba ^[2]

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